

STUDENT COMPOSER CONCERT #3

New works by composers from the University of
Toronto, Faculty of Music

Tuesday, February 4, 2020 @ 7:00pm
Walter Hall, Edward Johnson Building
University of Toronto

PROGRAMME

Der Pflaumenbaum

Elizabeth Legierski
Annika Telenius - soprano
Jialiang Zhu - piano

A Dream of Death

Michael (Michele) Selvaggi (b. 2000)
Abigail Sinclair - soprano
Maria Fedyushina - piano

The Song of Wandering Aengus

Carol Mak (b. 1998)
Elizabeth Legierski - soprano
Nicholas Wanstall - piano

Dance of the Fallens

Johnny Lai (b. 2001)
Jonah Ming Nung - piano
Juliana Hentosz - violin

Sonata for Solo Piano (2019)

Ricardo Ferro (b. 2000)
Ricardo Ferro - piano

Etude

Shreya Jha (b. 1998)
Shreya Jha - piano
Rena Seeger - dancer
Julie Seeger - dancer
Adrienne Davis - dancer
Chloe Flowers - dancer
Holly Melsom - dancer

Winter Suite

ii. Striations

Samuel Kerr (b. 2000)

Samuel Kerr - vibraphone

Christina Kant - harp

breathe

Vivian Kwok (b. 2000)

Concreamus chamber choir - Kai Leung, conductor

PLEASE ENSURE THAT YOUR CELL PHONE IS EITHER TURNED OFF, OR IN AIRPLANE MODE. EVEN IN VIBRATE/SILENT MODE, OUR MICROPHONES CAN PICK UP THE SIGNALS OF INCOMING CALLS, TEXTS, AND SO ON. THIS CAN RUIN RECORDINGS. THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

PROGRAMME NOTES

DER PFLAUMENBAUM

Der Pflaumenbaum (The Plum Tree) is taken from Brecht's *Svendborger Gedichte* collection -- written when he was exiled in Denmark during WWII in 1939. It begins with the famous words:

In the dark times
Will there also be singing?
Yes, there will also be singing
About the dark times.

The text is written with children in mind, and the section that contains this short poem is titled, *Deutsche Kriegsfibel* (German War Primer). The idea of constraint, suppression of identity and capability is palpable in the text -- paired with a colloquial and naive use of language. These elements are likewise reflected in the music.

Elizabeth Legierski is a Czech-Canadian soprano, currently enrolled at the University of Toronto in the studio of Dr. Darryl Edwards. She is pursuing a Bachelor of Voice Performance with a minor in Composition. In 2018, Elizabeth received a scholarship from the University of Toronto to attend: The Prague Summer Nights Young Artist Music Festival. There, she had her theatre debut as 'Varvara' in Janáček's *Katya Kabanova* in the Oskar Nedbal Theatre of Tábor, Czech Republic. Her debut in a full opera production came two weeks later in the historic Estates Theatre in Prague,

as 'Cherubino' in Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro*, under the direction of Gayle Shay, conducted by John Nardolillo.

A Dream of Death

A Dream of Death is an art song setting of Helen Hunt Jackson's poem "Dreams", written for solo soprano and piano, exploring the realm of impressionism and a synesthesia-driven compositional style. The poem deals with a very vivid, almost painful dream-like description of death, using emotional and descriptive imagery to portray the impression of death unto the listener. The composition makes use of the vivid, dream-like paintings of Monet, taking his colour palate and associating each colour with a specific pitch centre/sonority. The progression of colours in the painting is reflected in the changing harmonies of the piece itself, and the intensity of the harmonic change is determined by the drama of the poem. Together, the painting and poem serve to tell a story through the music—a beautiful, yet dark story about dreams and death.

Michael (Michele) Selvaggi is a second-year undergraduate student at the University of Toronto studying composition and comprehensive studies in euphonium. Currently studying composition with James Rolfe, Michael is exploring the realms of extended technique, impressionism, soundscape, and spectral composition and is excited to continue to share his works with the public—hopefully inspiring others to appreciate the beauty in post-tonal and harmonically-explorative music.

The Song of Wandering Aengus

This piece was written based on a poem by Yeats which depicts a man searching for his long, lost love. The text itself is reflective, mystical, and picturesque, and I tried to reflect that in my setting of the poem. The first stanza is exposition - the man is wandering through the forest to ease his a "fire in his head", which I interpreted to be a metaphor for love and passion. In the second stanza, the love he is searching materializes, transforming from a trout into a woman, but it is only in his imagination. In this moment, the music culminates through a modulation and change of texture into a more speech-like, free setting. In the last stanza, the man conveys his determination to find his love, though she evades him. Throughout the piece, a monotonous, ostinato-like figure in the piano conveys the "limbo" this man is in because of his unending search for his love.

Carol Mak is a singer, songwriter and composer born and based in Toronto. She is a part of many vocal and instrumental ensembles of

varying genres - in all of which she is an active soloist, chorister, arranger and composer. Primarily a vocal composer, Carol has also written for instrumental ensembles such as the Gryphon Trio. Although she is studying classical voice at U of T, she also has a background in musical theatre and commercial music. She currently studies composition under the guidance of Larysa Kuzmenko.

Dance of the Fallens

Dance of the Fallens was composed in winter of 2019 by Johnny Lai, a first year music student. The piece is a duet of piano/violin, inspired by the fictional character Arthas Menefil and his dramatic storyline. It is composed in the style of western music with the violin expressing dramatic change of emotions. The piece starts with despair then quickly transforms into anger and violence with the intensive rhythm. Then, the thoughts of love and kindness kicks in with solos from both the violinist and pianist. After the warm and loving section, the violin begins to return to the main theme with its own virtuosic solo. The return of despair ends the entire piece with the feeling of being trapped to dance with the emotional pain for eternity. The audience is encouraged to listen to the rhythmic and tempo change which drastically hinted the developing emotion of the piece.

Growing up from Taiwan and Canada, **Johnny Lai** has been exploring his composition techniques and styles since the late years of his high school life. As a young pianist, he was always into public improvisation and took his passion into events such as churches, music nights, and meeting where people request for music. It was in the late years of high school that under the influence of his music teacher Darren Moore, he started to transform the random ideas in his head to some structured and planned compositions. With his first commission to produce soundtracks for a FutureTech during a summer break, his passion towards creating music was strengthened at the end of his high school years. Now, as a first year music student of U of T, he is excited to present his works and advance his techniques with other composers.

Sonata for Solo Piano (2019)

Dominating formal structure from the beginning of the Classical era to the fall of the Romantic movement, “Sonata Form” (to use the largely generalized, if sometimes inaccurate term) was a dominant force in the development of instrumental music in Europe. Even within the 20th and 21st century, this dramatic structure has been adapted and used

by composers to great success. The single-movement Sonata for Solo Piano presented today looks to the often difficult task of the contemporary composer to blend tradition and innovation. Blending a poly-stylistic musical language and a free treatment of rhythm within what appears, at first, to be a traditional musical structure, the Piano Sonata builds frantically until it collapses under its own weight, unable to come to completion. What is left is permutations and fragments of the themes that constituted it, as they fade away into silence.

Ricardo Ferro is a Venezuelan-Canadian composer. He has worked with numerous North American ensembles and individuals including the Calidore String Quartet, Cambridge Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra Breva, Younggun Kim, Oakville Youth Symphony Orchestra, Concreamus Chamber Choir, and Women on the Verge. He has additionally written award-winning music for film and theatre for festivals across North America. He has twice been invited as a composer to the Toronto Arts & Letters Club's Annual Concert Series.

Ricardo has performed with several renowned conductors and ensembles across Ontario as a pianist, singer, and horn player. Passionate about the performance of contemporary music, he co-founded Green Room Sound Collective, an organization dedicated to the performance of new works, where he currently acts as artistic director. Ricardo is committed to the field of music education, frequently working in partnership with Sistema Toronto and for the University of Toronto Faculty of Music History and Theory Department as an undergraduate history guest lecturer. Ricardo is currently pursuing a degree in composition at the University of Toronto, where he studies composition under Norbert Palej and piano under Younggun Kim. Most recently, Ricardo has received a Toronto Arts Council Music Project Grant for *Fugue State*, a chamber opera in one act to be premiered April 2nd.

Etude

Etude is a commentary on ballet pedagogy in the 21st century. It presents a common circumstance wherein the absence of a dance teacher prompts misbehaviour from the students of the class. The music reflects the situation by starting simple and orderly before fragmenting and devolving into anarchy. *Etude* incorporates theatrical elements and explores the notion of dancers as instruments.

Shreya Jha is a fourth year music composition and neuroscience student at the University of Toronto, presently studying under James Rolfe. The Scarborough Philharmonic Orchestra has commissioned Shreya for multiple pieces since 2016. In March 2017 and 2018, the Gryphon Trio premiered her pieces at their Trinity College coffeehouse. Her first musical *Statistics*, originated at the University of Toronto Drama Festival 2019, went on to win the Adams Prize for Musical Theatre and will be remounted at the 2020 Fringe Festival. She has had two other musicals programmed and premiered at the University of Toronto – *Connections* in November 2019 and *Luv*, to be premiered in March 2020. Shreya has also written incidental music for numerous plays around University of Toronto theatre. Shreya is keenly interested in the intersections between music and neuroscience and hopes to investigate the impact of music on the brain and human health.

Striations

Striations is the second movement of a three-part suite for 2 percussionists and harp. While the first movement reflects on the soft, almost ethereal energy of a light snowfall, the second movement is meant to emulate the swirling, austere shapes snow makes after it comes to rest—a fresh morning snowfall in the Rockies comes to mind.

Though other movements contain more significant and diverse percussion writing, *Striations'* simple balance of vibraphone and harp reflects the more relaxed stillness present in the immediate aftermath of snowfall. The vibraphone's original name, '*vibraharp*' comes into focus in the composition; the piece makes use of the lovely ringing, clear qualities of both instruments together to create a lush, warm sound—hopefully evocative of that perfect snowy morning

A Calgary-born percussionist, pianist, and composer, **Samuel Kerr** has performed throughout Europe and Canada as both an ensemble member and soloist. After completion of his RCM piano work, Sam has composed and arranged works for numerous types of musical ensemble.

Sam is enrolled in the Bachelor of Music in Performance program at the University of Toronto, where he currently studies percussion with Dr. Aiyun Huang and John Rudolph. He currently pursuing a composition minor under the tutelage of Gary Kulesha.

Sam is a member of the University of Toronto Symphony Orchestra and Percussion Ensemble and was a winner of the 2018/19 Toronto Symphony Youth Orchestra concerto competition. Beyond his

studies, he currently serves as a student ambassador at the Faculty of Music.

Breathe

breathe explores the tensions this new generation is facing currently. Sometimes we are troubled by stress and problems around us. Sometimes we are kept awake by anxiety and we simply cannot rest. Sometimes we are so tired we just want to quit. It seems like our distress never goes away, as if it is a storm cloud that lingers and never dissipates...

But there is a place where we can find rest. Somewhere that we can forget our vexations and be at ease. This place is different for everyone, and how to get there is yet to be answered, but ultimately, we need to slow down and allow ourselves to breathe, to sleep just to find strength for taking on new challenges everyday.

Hong Kong-born performer and composer **Vivian Kwok** is known for her versatile style and active engagement in the creation of new music. As an emerging young composer, she has written for the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra as part of their Young Composers' Project in 2018, conducted her music with the M.E. LaZerte High School concert band, and produced numerous chamber and electronic projects alongside her colleagues. As a pianist and violinist, she has received awards and scholarships from the Hong Kong Schools Music Festival, the Alberta College Fall Music Festival, and the Edmonton Kiwanis Music Festival. Vivian is currently pursuing her bachelor's degree in Piano Performance under the tutelage of Jamie Parker, accompanied by a minor in Composition, where she studies with Abigail Richardson-Schulte. Her previous composition teachers include Kenneth Pearse, Corey Whaley, and John McPherson.

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We would also like to thank Peter Olsen for recording our music and making it sound beautiful.

Please join us for Student Composer Concert #4 – Tuesday, March 17, 2020 at 7:00pm in Walter Hall.

